

Message Text

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SE C R E T DAMASCUS 5149

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DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, EG, PLO, LE

SUBJECT: KHADDAM COMMENTS ON SYRO-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS AND
SYRIAN-PLO AGREEMENT

1. SUMMARY: KHADDAM UNHAPPY WITH EGYPTIAN PROPAGANDA
ATTACKS ON SYRIA, MAINTAINING THAT IN LATEST ROUND EGYPT
HAD STRUCK THE FIRST BLOW. BELIEVES PEACE PROSPECTS IN
LEBANON ARE SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY MAJOR INFLUX ARMS
AND PERSONNEL ARRIVING IN RECENT DAYS. SYRIA WAS
CONTINUING TO PRESS FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF CAIRO ACCORDS LIMITING PALESTINIAN ARMS. DESCRIBED
SELF AS MORE SKEPTICAL THAN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PEACE
PROSPECTS. END SUMMARY.

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2. SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS:

MET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM LATE EVENING AUGUST 3. AFTER ACKNOWLEDGING AND RECIPROCATING SECRETARY'S GREETINGS, KHADDAM STARTED OFF WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT PROGRESS OF OUR ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HE GRATUITOUSLY (AND ONLY SEMI-FACETIOUSLY) EXPRESSED HOPE THAT PRESIDENT FORD "WILL DROP PRESIDENT SADAT AS HIS NEAR EAST ADVISOR." SADAT'S COUNSEL, KHADDAM ARGUED, WILL HURT FORD AS IT HAD HURT NIXON. I CUT HIM OFF ON THAT THEME BUT SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION DEMONSTRATED DEPTH OF KHADDAMS IRRITATION AT LEAST IS WITH EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP.

3. DISCUSSING REVIVAL OF PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA. KHADDAM SAID THAT IT ONLY DEMONSTRATED THE SHALLOWNESS OF THE EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP. "WHO WOULD BELIEVE EGYPTIAN CLAIM THAT THERE HAD BEEN A MEETING IN GENEVA BETWEEN SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS?" OF COURSE, SYRIA HAS CONTINUED TO CRITICIZE THE SINAI AGREEMENT ABOUT WHICH ITS STAND IS WELL KNOWN. PALESTINIANS SHARED SYRIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SINAI ACCORD AND "THOSE VERY PALESTINIANS WHO ARE FRIENDS OF EGYPT WERE THE ONES WHO INSISTED THE ACCORD BE ATTACKED IN OUR JOINT COMMUNIQUE. WE WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO." ASKED HOW THIS RELATED TO AGREEMENT AT RIYADH CONFERENCE TO STOP HOSTILE PROPAGANDA EXCHANGES, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT IT HAD BEEN EGYPT WHICH HAD KEPT UP THE CAMPAIGN. SYRIA HAD SHOWN CONSIDERABLE FOREBEARANCE, REMAINING RATIONAL AND LOGICAL IN CRITICIZING EGYPT AND AVOIDING CHEAP SHOTS WHICH SERVED NO PURPOSE. I OBSERVED THAT CRITICISMS OF EGYPT IN THE DAMASCUS MORNING PRESS HAD STRUCK ME AS STRONG STUFF. KHADDAM REPLIED THE SARG HAD GIVEN STRICT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE MEDIA TO REMAIN RATIONAL (SIC). SYRIA MAINTAINED A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN ANALYTICAL COMMENTARY AND "A DIRTY PRESS CAMPAIGN." SYRIA HAD SEDULOUSLY AVOIDED ANY PERSONAL ATTACKS ON EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP, WHILE THE EGYPTIANS DIRECTLY ATTACKED INDIVIDUALS. THE EGYPTIANS ALSO LIED. THEY WELL KNEW THERE HAD BEEN NO MEETING BETWEEN SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS BUT "THEY ARE SHAMELESS AND NO ONE TAKES THEIR CRITICISM SERIOUSLY." (COMMENT: EXCEPT PERHAPS KHADDAM,

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WHO HAD WITHIN THE PREVIOUS FIVE MINUTES TWICE REACTED SHARPLY TO THAT PARTICULAR EGYPTIAN ACCUSATION.)

4. I SAID THAT GIVEN THE MANY COMMON INTERESTS BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA I HOPED THIS RENEWED EXCHANGE OF PROPAGANDA ATTACKS WOULD BE A PASSING PHENOMENON. KHADDAM SAID THAT HE CERTAINLY HOPED SO

5. SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN ACCORD:

ASKED TO COMMENT ON LAST WEEK'S AGREEMENT BETWEEN SARG AND THE PLO, KHADDAM SAID HE NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ITS RESULTS BECAUSE "FOREIGN ELEMENTS" ARE WORKING ACTIVELY TO KEEP THE WAR GOING. HE OTHERWISE SPOKE LARGELY IN PLATITUDES. NOTED THAT SYRIA HAD EXERTED CONSIDERABLE EFFORT TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH THE PLO IN THE HOPE IT WOULD BE A STEP TO RESTORE PEACE TO LEBANON. BUT THE AMOUNT OF WEAPONS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL ARRIVING IN LEBANON IN RECENT DAYS HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE AND THREATENED TO UNDERMINE THE AGREEMENT.

6. SAID I HAD BEEN ENCOURAGED THAT THE AGREEMENT STRUCK TO EVACUATE WOUNDED FROM TEL ZA'TAR HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT EARLIER THAT DAY. (COMMENT: SYRIAN MEDIA CLAIMED THIS WAS RESULT OF SYRIAN EFFORTS.) THIS WAS AN ENCOURAGING SIGN. I NOTED THAT ASAD IN HIS JULY 20 SPEECH HAD SPOKEN OF INTERVENING IN LEBANON TO SECURE A NEW BALANCE OF FORCES BETWEEN THE PARTIES BELIEVING THAT PEACE WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE IF EITHER SIDE FELT ITS EXISTENCE THREATENED. TODAY IT APPEARED SUCH NEW BALANCE MIGHT BE IN THE MAKING. WERE THERE THEREFORE GROUNDS FOR NEW HOPE? KHADDAM SAID HE THOUGHT NOT BECAUSE LEBANON WAS THE TARGET OF WORLD WIDE ARMS SUPPLY. HE THEN GIBED, "WHO IS THE U.S. ARMING?" REPLIED I WAS HAPPY TO SAY THAT AMERICA WAS ONE OF THE FEW COUNTRIES NOT SENDING ARMS TO LEBANON. HE QUICKLY DROPPED THE SUBJECT.

7. SAID I ASSUMED THAT HOWEVER DIFFICULT IT WAS TO PREDICT, SURELY DAMASCUS HAD SOME TIME FRAME IN MIND TO BRING THE LEBANESE CRISIS TO AN END AS WE HAD EVERY REASON TO ASSUME SYRIA WANTED TO DO. INDEED SYRIA DID WANT A QUICK END TO
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THE FIGHTING, KHADDAM REPLIED, BUT SYRIA WAS UP AGAINST MAJOR FOREIGN ELEMENTS SEEKING CONTINUATION OF THE FIGHTING. I SAID WE HAD HEARD IN THE LAST FEW DAYS ABOUT CONTINUED FIGHTING IN THE METN AND ABOUT NEW MOVEMENT OF SYRIAN TROOPS IN THE JEZZINE AREA. DID THIS ACTIVITY FIT INTO AN OVERALL SYRIAN PLAN TO MOVE THE CONFLICT TO AN END? KHADDAM DENIED THERE WERE SYRIAN TROOP MOVEMENTS AROUND JEZZINE BUT BEYOND THAT, ADDED ONLY THAT SYRIA WAS TRYING TO ATTAIN PROGRESS THROUGH THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

8. ASKED IF ARAB LEAGUE FORCES WERE BECOMING MORE EFFECTIVE, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT THEY STILL SERVED ONLY A LIMITED SYMBOLIC PURPOSE ALTHOUGH THE LIBYAN FORCES HAD RECENTLY RECEIVED NEW AND HEAVIER WEAPONS, INCLUDING APCs.

9. CAIRO ACCORDS:

ASKED IF SYRIA HAD REACHED AGREEMENT WITH PLO ABOUT ARMS LIMITATIONS AND PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL TO THE CAMPS, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT SYRIA HAD STRESSED TO THE PLO THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT PREREQUISITE FOR PEACE. IT WAS NOT IN THE PALESTINIANS' INTEREST TO FIGHT FOR A CAUSE AND ON TERRITORY WHICH WAS NOT THEIRS.

10. KHADDAM DOUBTED THAT PARTICIPATION OF A PFLP-GC REPRESENTATIVE IN LAST WEEK'S TALKS HERE INDICATED ANY SHIFT IN THE REJECTIONIST FRONT ATTITUDES. NOTED THAT SINCE JUNE THE PFLP-GC HAD BEEN SPLIT INTO TWO. THE PART REPRESENTED IN LAST WEEK'S TALKS WAS NOT THE HARDLINERS. HOWEVER, HE MAINTAINED THE ORDINARY PALESTINIAN CITIZEN WANTS AN END TO THE FIGHTING. THERE ARE "WISE TRENDS" AT WORK AMONG THE PALESTINIANS WHO WANT TO BRING THE CONFLICT TO AN END. BUT HE WAS UNSURE THAT THE PALESTINIANS COULD PULL THEMSELVES TOGETHER AT ANY EARLY DATE. HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS MORE SKEPTICAL THAN OPTIMISTIC, BECAUSE OF THOSE IN THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP WHO WERE STILL AT THE BECK AND CALL OF OUTSIDE FORCES.

11. COMMENT: I FIND IT HARD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND SECRET

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THE SYRIAN PRESS IN AWARDING FIRST PRIZE FOR SCURRILOUS ATTACKS. "ANALYTICAL COMMENTARY" AND RATIONALITY EXIST MOSTLY IN THE EYE OF THE AUTHOR.
MURPHY

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